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AUTHOR Foster, Lenoar
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model of graduate education for advanced teachers and aspiring school administrators that establishes and fosters the foundations for the development of the professional community in schools. Graduate students enrolled in the first distance-education cohort of a new graduate-degree program became cognizant of the need and importance of the professional community as a vehicle for greater understanding and collaboration. The study describes ways to confront professional isolation and the toll that such isolation takes on educators. It discusses ways to enhance the educational professional community through graduate-degree program design. The paper then presents the results of a 5-year longitudinal study of graduate students in a distance-education cohort graduate-degree program in education. The study focuses on tracking the meanings and activities attributed by graduates of the program to their growing understanding and involvement in building the foundations of the professional community among their colleagues and within schools. All students agreed that the program had deepened their understanding of qualities needed by teachers and school leaders. (RJM)

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PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER LEADER PREPARATION VIA A COLLABORATIVE DISTANCE PROGRAM: BUILDING THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Lenoar Foster
The University of Montana

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Principal and Teacher Leader Preparation Via a Collaborative Distance Program: Building the Professional Community for School Reform

Introduction

Louis et al (1996a) define the ***professional community*** by five characterizations that emphasize the need for principals and teachers to work together in effecting positive outcomes for student learning. These characterizations include:

- Shared norms and values: an affirmation by the members of the school community through language and actions of their common assumptions about children, learning, teaching and teachers' roles, the importance of interpersonal connectedness, and a commitment to the collective good of the school;
- Reflective dialogue: a promotion of teachers' awareness about their professional practices and their consequences, with a communal commitment to regular and consistent conversation among teachers about academic, curricular, and instructional concerns of practice within the school as well as conversations about student development and progress;
- De-privatization of practice: a commitment by teachers to a public practice of their profession and to sharing and trading roles as mentors, advisers, or specialists when giving and receiving assistance from peers ;

- Collective focus on student learning: a promotion of teacher discussions and actions that center on students' opportunities to learn and to benefit from collaborative efforts within the school; and
- Collaboration: a promotion of efforts, an outgrowth of reflective dialogue and deprivatized practice, that bolster shared understandings and reinforce the interrelationships within the school.

Notably, the formation and implementation of the 'professional community" within a school will require the collaborative interaction of principals and empowered teachers with a shared vision of education. The development of such a community within the school will require that the school principal "lead from the center rather than from a position at the top of an organizational hierarchy " (Louis et al, 1996a, p.18). This new configuration of leadership will dictate a new image of the school principal as intellectual leader and will emphasize a connection "with the world of pedagogical ideas, educational research, and the expertise of others" (Louis et al, 1996a, p. 18).

Empowering teachers to take significant roles in shared decision making fosters an environment that encourages them to interact with the principal and with each other and to take stands on issues affecting education within the school. Short (1994) notes, "Teachers must resolve conflicts with colleagues; they must come to decisions they can work with, even if they are not in agreement. They must identify options, understand the consequences of each option, and select the option that will be the most beneficial to students and the school at large" (p.41). Equally important, the knowledge base of teachers must include information about team dynamics, conflict resolution, budget/fiscal

management, procurement issues, technical expertise in the use of computers for both learning and school operations, negotiations, and consensus decision making (Short, 1994).

From whence will the foundation for providing this new dynamic for the creation of professional communities in schools, so necessary for effective restructuring, reform, and student learning outcomes, spring? This paper delineates a model of graduate education ,within a single format of distance education, for advanced prepared teachers and aspiring school administrators which establishes and fosters the foundations for the development of the professional community in schools of the present and future. Further, this paper will present how graduate students enrolled in the first distance cohort of this new graduate degree program have become cognizant of the need and importance of the "professional community" as a vehicle for greater understanding and collaboration among teachers and principals in achieving school goals and outcomes.

Building the Foundation for the 'Professional Community' Within Schools: Confronting Professional Isolation

The nature of "teacher work" and "principal work" in schools is problematic, in part, because of the historical development of the teaching profession and the bureaucratic nature of school management (Sergiovanni, 1991; Short and Greer, 1997). Little (1982) has noted that teachers are isolated in the conduct of their work in most school environments because they have little contact and lack input into what happens in the school outside of their respective classrooms. Rosenholtz (1985) credits this isolation as

the major impediment to successful teaching, and Little (1982) credits the lack of collegiality in teaching to the effects of this systematic isolation of teachers as professionals.

The endemic effects of this isolation take its toll on both teachers and principals in their professional interactions (Zielinski and Hoy, 1983; Rosenholtz, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1991; Frase and Sorenson, 1992; Short and Greer, 1997). Among these effects are: (1) feelings of inadequacy and insecurity; (2) lack of trust among principals and teachers; (3) less sharing among teachers and principals as professionals engaged in the same pursuit; (4) competition among teachers and less collaborative and cooperative ventures for resources and time; and (5) less teacher involvement in the work life of the school. Ashton and Webb (1986) observe that this professional isolation can contribute to the need by teachers to adopt the status quo and to avoid situations in which prevailing norms of school life are questioned and confronted. The residual effect is that teachers accept their own lack of empowerment in the work place of the school and lose the creativity, commitment, and energy necessary to contribute to the betterment of instructional activities and improvement (Frase and Sorenson, 1992).

Sergiovanni (1991) observes that consistent communication and relationships between principals and teachers in schools are important ingredients in effectively carrying out important instructional and professional obligations and duties. A number of researchers (National Center for Effective Schools, 1990; Lieberman and Miller, 1990; Bredeson, 1994) have outlined the significance and importance of collegial interactions among school personnel for promoting and institutionalizing change within schools. That

principals and teachers must be actively involved in 'professional dialogue' among themselves to effect substantive change for school improvement and student learning is a recognized foundation for overall school effectiveness (National Center for Effective Schools, 1990).

Aiding the Articulation of the Educational 'Professional Community' Through Graduate Degree Program Design

An assessment in 1994 by the Center for Continuing Education of The University of Montana of the postgraduate educational needs of school personnel in western and central Montana evidenced a need for graduate education in two specific areas. These areas included advanced classroom pedagogy and technology (Curriculum and Instruction) for classroom teachers and graduate education for school personnel contemplating careers in educational administration and supervision (Educational Leadership). Enrollments to sustain two distinct graduate degree programs that would meet the distinct educational needs of school personnel in the region proved to be insufficient.

Driven by the need to respond to the educational needs of Montana educators and by the opportunity to provide an arena for the discussion and implementation of school reform through a graduate programmatic design that would foster the "professional conversation" among educators, the departments of Educational Leadership and Counseling and Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, The University of Montana, entered upon a cooperative venture to offer a distance delivered graduate

degree program that would meet the educational career goals and needs of the two distinct groups of students. Course work was designed around six themes of instruction that have been cited as a basis for substantive reform and restructuring of contemporary education (Boyd, 1996; Louis et al, 1996a). These themes of instruction include:

- Evolution of the Curriculum and Instruction Process
- Instructional Design and Technology Planning
- Program Evaluation and Continuous Renewal
- Special Education and Law
- Learning and Support Systems
- Cross-Cultural Issues and Diversity

Development of this collaborative distance graduate degree program is organized by the School of Education under its NCATE accredited graduate degree program in Curriculum Studies, a degree granting program operated under the auspices of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Course work for the degree is comprised of essential courses from the departments of Educational Leadership and Counseling and Curriculum and Instruction that provide a pedagogical and/or administrative focus for students. Academic work from this degree program can be applied toward advanced teacher certification and school administrator licensure in the State of Montana. Thirty-seven (37) graduate semester credits and a written comprehensive examination are required for the degree, and course work is delivered over seven semesters. Six graduate semester credits (two cross listed courses- EDLD/C&I) are offered one night a week (day is negotiable based on the professional needs of the cohort group) from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00

p.m. This graduate degree program is delivered in a portable distance format to one of two centers of higher education in the state under the auspices of The University of Montana. Three interactive delivery systems are being utilized in the electronic transmission of courses. These systems include: (1) METNET, the State of Montana's two way compressed interactive video system; (2) PictureTel, a desktop videoconferencing system that enables students and instructors to interact utilizing audio, video, and software sharing applications; and (3) ProShare, an interactive Windows based communication network for sharing applications and documents between faculty and students (Kindrick et al, 1996).

Specific student services include assisting students with: distance registration, library access, establishment and maintenance of E-mail accounts, delivery of files, documents, videos, books and course handout materials. Access to Internet services is provided to each student at the higher education center to facilitate interaction with faculty members and advisors and to increase research capabilities. Internet and data based networks (Griznet) have provided access to students to the main library of The University of Montana at Missoula and to interlibrary loan services through the Montana State University System and the Montana State Library.

Tenured and tenure track faculty from each of the cooperating two departments comprise the instructional staff for this graduate distance degree program. An important programmatic aspect of the program is that faculty team teach within the identified themes of the instructional program in order to model collaborative professional interaction and

outcomes, and to provide a knowledge base and environment for student exchanges, exclusive of the program emphasis selected from the program (teaching or administration).

An Investigation into Building the 'Professional Community': Testing the Efficacy of a Graduate Distance Degree Program

Profile of the Graduate Distance Degree Cohort

Delivery of this degree program began in the 1995 fall semester at the higher education center in Helena, Montana (Helena College of Technology of The University of Montana). Thirty (30) practicing teachers who work and live in western and central Montana comprised the first cohort group. These teachers were educators in elementary, middle, and secondary schools in central and western Montana. Fourteen (14) students pursued a programmatic emphasis in Educational Leadership that would prepare them as school administrators. Sixteen student (16) pursued an emphasis in classroom pedagogy and applications. This cohort group represented the first group of graduate students who would receive their complete graduate education via distance from the School of Education at the University of Montana

Research Context: Testing the Viability of Forming the 'Professional Community'

Louis et al (1996b) note that the professionalism of teachers, the professional interaction between administrators and teachers, and teacher involvement in sustained professional groups are critical ingredients to the empowerment and commitment of teachers and to the success of school reform and restructuring efforts initiated by school

leaders. In testing the efficacy of this distance graduate degree program as a conduit for the foundational development of the "professional community" in schools where the graduate students were situated, three assumptions were made: (1) that the cohort nature of the distance program would provide a supportive and systematic forum for engagement of students in discussions relative to educational problems, issues, and reform efforts taking place or being considered at their individual site schools; (2) that the proximity afforded by the distance nature of the program and its field based course requirements would provide for more personal communications between teachers, school administrators, and other school stakeholders; and (3) that more "professionalized teachers and potential school leaders" would feel more empowered and skilled serving on school committees and that they would engage in more extramural discussions related to reform and/or other innovations at their schools.

Methods and Purposes

The data analyzed in this study were gathered as part of a five year longitudinal study of graduate students in a distance cohort graduate degree program in Education. Symbolic interactions, described by Blumer (1969), provided the theoretical framework for this longitudinal study. Symbolic interactionism rests on three major premises: (1) People act towards things and other people based on the meanings these things have for them; (2) meanings are social projects that arise during social interaction; and (3) people attach meanings to other people, objects, situations, and events through a process of social interpretation. The methodological approach focused on how students viewed the efficacy of their graduate training as a means to: (1) enlighten and broaden their understanding of

educational practice and administration in addressing school issues, problems, and the process of change and reform; and (2) empower them to be participants and change agents in addressing educational issues, problems, and the process of change and reform at their site schools. More specifically, this longitudinal study is being guided by the following question: (1) How will graduates of this degree program see meaning in their actions and work toward building the "professional community" at their site schools?

Sources of the Data and Procedures of the Study

Participants in this study included the 30 students formally enrolled as graduate students in the first distance graduate degree cohort program organized and administered by the departments of Educational Leadership and Counseling and Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education, The University of Montana. Four sources were utilized for the gathering of data: (1) A written "Reflective Administrative Ideals Paper" submitted by each student; (2) written results from a "Leadership Site Interview" conducted by each student; (3) a focused dialogue which occurred in an introductory Educational Leadership course during the 1996 summer session; and (4)) a questionnaire survey anonymously completed by students following graduation from the program in Fall, 1997.

Students wrote a "Reflective Administrative Ideals Paper" and conducted a "Leadership Site Interview" during the spring semester (1996) as requirements for a course in Educational Leadership that was scheduled for the summer session (1996). Because of the dual preparatory nature of this distance degree program (Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership), the focus of the "Reflective Administrative Ideals

Paper" had its basis in the programmatic emphasis selected by each student. Following is an outline of the questions and issues by programmatic emphasis that were addressed by each student writing the paper:

Curriculum and Instruction Emphasis

- What personal skills do I bring to the classroom that I feel make me an effective teacher?
- What contributions do I believe I can make to the revision and advancement of of curriculum in my school and/or school district?
- What knowledge base, information, skill(s), and/or proficiencies do I believe I must acquire in order to become a "Master Teacher" and to become a curriculum leader in my school and/or school district

Educational Leadership (Administration) Emphasis

- What personal qualities do I bring to the potential practice of educational leadership?
- What contributions do I believe I can make to the effective organization and functioning of an educational environment?
- What knowledge base, information, skill(s), and/or proficiencies do I believe I must acquire in order to become a potentially effective educational leader?

The "Educational Site Interview" required that each student engage a school principal in a conversation about the operations of the school site, the principal's philosophy of education and vision, and the challenges facing the principalship as perceived by the principal being interviewed. Students could interview their own site principal, select a principal at another school site, or interview a principal at a different site and level at which they aspired to work. As part of the closure to the interview process, students were required to obtain the principal's signature on the visitation verification form that was provided as part of the course requirement.

Data supporting the findings of this research were gleaned from the perspectives of the 30 students who submitted two required written course assignments (Reflective

Administrative Ideals Paper and write-up of the Educational Site Interview) and from a focused dialogue which took place within the context of the Educational leadership course offered during the 1996 summer session. All thirty students participated in the writing assignments and in the classroom focused dialogue. A questionnaire survey administered during the 1997 fall semester provided focused perspectives on the relationship between the learning and professional growth of the students via the graduate program and their involvement/participation on committees or in initiatives aimed at instituting innovation and/or reform at their schools or within their school districts. Twenty-two completed surveys were analyzed for the purposes of this phase of the study.

Results

Reflective Administrative Ideals Paper

All thirty students completed a written reflective administrative ideals paper. Fourteen papers emphasized an orientation toward preparation for school leadership positions. Sixteen papers emphasized an orientation toward preparation for advanced classroom pedagogy. Several distinctive themes emerged relating to the programmatic emphases of students.

Students in the school leadership and classroom tracks delineated similar lists of "personal skills" that they felt made them effective teachers, or that would make them potentially good leaders. These major personal qualities included: (1) caring for the best interests and welfare of all students; (2) being a good listener; (3) being able to work

cooperatively and collaboratively with different groups of school stakeholders; and (4) having a willingness to be a strong advocate for their teachers and students.

Students with a classroom applications emphasis in the program overwhelmingly believed that the major contribution they could make to the revision and advancement of curriculum in their school and/or their school district included: (1) the ability to experiment with different teaching strategies that addressed individual student needs, and (2) the ability to work cooperatively with other teachers in delivering educationally sound programs for students.

Three major contributions to organizational effectiveness surfaced among students with a school leadership emphasis in the program. These students believed they possessed: (1) good organizational and management skills; (2) good public relations skills; and (3) the ability to motivate others through a cooperative and collaborative vision for a school.

Both groups of students converged in their needs to become more technologically literate for classroom practices and administrative purposes. Leadership students expressed an additional need to become more proficient in the areas of school law and school budgeting procedures.

The Educational Site Interview

All thirty students enrolled in the cohort program completed a site interview with a school principal. The majority of students interviewed their own school principal. The average amount of time that each student spent interviewing a principal averaged one and one half hours. Students were generous in their praise for the time principals gave to the interview process, despite hectic and busy schedules.

Students, without exception, marveled at the complexity of the duties and interactions navigated by principals during the course of a single day. Frustrations commonly cited by principals in the written interviews submitted and discussed by cohort students included in the following:

- the inability to perform teacher evaluations in an effective and timely manner;
- little time to confer with teachers on important issues;
- budgeting restraints which curtailed important curriculum initiatives, especially technology tasks;
- increasing paper work which distracted from the real business of school life;
- growing school disciplinary problems;
- inability to motivate and involve a substantial number of parents in school activities; and
- growing family problems which interfered with school effectiveness.

Focused Dialogue

A focused dialogue session based on students' "reflective administrative papers" and "educational site interviews" occurred in the educational leadership course (Foundations of Educational Leadership) during the first term of the 1996 summer session. The session was taped for accuracy of student comments and interactions. The focus of the dialogue was twofold: (1) to delineate issues and problems that served as barriers to greater communication of school mission and the attainment of overall school goals as a learning organization; and (2) to suggest ways in which greater communication between all members of the school community could be better fostered and strengthened. A major theme emanating from the discussion was the problem of teacher and principal

communications which a majority of the students viewed as essential for connecting all operations of school life. Following are comments illustrative of this theme:

> *I can't see the effectiveness of schooling having a chance for success unless there are clear lines of communication between teachers and administrators. Much of this lack of communication, I feel, is attributable to teachers and principals not really trusting each other. Another part of this communication gap is attributable to role determination and expectations. Principals, who probably were average to excellent teachers, have forgotten the talk and work of teaching, or at least they appear so most of the time. And teachers feel like they can't completely communicate with their principals about the work of teaching.*
>
> *Teachers are so held up in their own classrooms that they fail to see the role they can play in the overall effectiveness of the school. Some of this is teacher fault because teachers choose this posture, and some of this is due to the fact that teachers don't know what authority or role they have in suggesting or implementing change.*
>
> *I think that both teachers and principals are threatened in their respective positions. Principals assume an authority role which may cloud their ability to work on the hard issues of teaching other than managing the building which is important. And teachers assume a closed door attitude about teaching and talk about minor management issues of school which bother them personally but have nothing to do with the overall effectiveness of the school.*

When asked if there was hope in bettering the lines of communication and work through a better understanding of principal and teacher leadership roles, several students, with varying levels of agreement among the class members, offered the following:

> *Principals need to recapture their roles as leader teachers. Isn't that the meaning of the term principal? By this I mean that principals must help teachers to understand all of the dynamics involved in reaching a decision and promote discussion of those dynamics on the part of all teachers. Teachers, in turn, must be willing to come to an understanding of this process and willingly involve themselves without feeling inadequate or threatened.*
>
> *I think the present emphasis on site based management is a start. This administrative model holds great promise because it involves as many*

people as want to become involved in the decision making mode of the school as a learning organization. Teachers still need to know the whole picture of running the school so that their decisions are more totally school based than individually or selfishly based. In this way we all can play a role, as best we can with the talents that we have, to make schooling successful and rewarding.

Before I enrolled in this graduate degree program, I must admit that I often didn't want to know too much about school business if it didn't relate to my own personal classroom activities. This is true even in light of the fact that I have a principal who is really interested in allowing teachers to have a wide span of involvement. I felt that my teaching secrets which have worked well for me for years were solely mine, and that other teachers needed to work as hard as I had to do the same. I now see the great value in being involved in all aspects of the school, from curriculum work to co-curricular work, and I see myself as being a mentor and advisor to our school's younger teachers who seem to welcome my advice, cooperation, and collaboration in their teaching and work situations. Working in this way has given me new energy and the desire to bring about some change at my own school. Too, I've learned a few new creative approaches from three younger teachers at my school that have improved my own teaching and the environment of my own classroom. We're thinking about submitting a district grant for our present teaching projects in history and music, which have become more interdisciplinary in approach, and of seeking support from our principal and fellow teachers to implement this teaching approach throughout the school curriculum.

The Questionnaire Survey

A survey questionnaire designed by the researcher was mailed to the 30 graduates of the first cohort distance graduate degree program in Fall, 1997 (November, 1997). The purpose of the questionnaire was to: (1) gather an initial perspective by the graduates of the efficacy of their degree program in expanding their understanding of the professional qualities needed by an effective administrator; (2) to chart the involvement by Cohort One graduates in initiatives, programs, and activities that fostered the development and understanding of the "professional community"in their site schools and within their school

districts. Twenty-two graduates (73%) completed an anonymous survey as part of the data gathering tasks of this phase of the study. All of the respondents to the survey remained employed in the schools to which they were assigned prior to and after graduating from the program. Number of years in teaching by respondents ranged from 2 years to 25 years, and the average teaching tenure in respondents' present school ranged from 4 years to 25 years. Of the twenty-two respondents, twelve students indicated that they planned careers in school administration and ten students planned to remain in the classroom after completing graduate studies.

All twenty-two students (100%) agreed that their graduate course work , combined with their interactions with their peers in the cohort, had expanded and deepened their perspectives and understanding of the professional and personal qualities needed by an effective school administrator, and of the important and crucial role that teachers could play in the current reform and restructuring movement in their individual schools. Respondents listed, in the order of importance, the following personal qualities that they deemed necessary for the effective school leader:

- vision and leadership skills;
- public relations skills;
- organizational and managerial skills;
- knowledge of curriculum and learning styles of students; and

working collaboratively with other school people.

Journeying Toward the 'Professional Community'. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the respondents to the questionnaire survey indicated that they had become active and

involved in activities and initiatives either at their school or within their school district as a result of their enrollment in the distance graduate degree program. While slightly over twenty percent (20%) said that they would have probably become involved in such activities to some extent without benefit of the degree program, twenty-seven percent (27%) indicated that they would not have become involved in such activities without benefit of the degree program. Over fifty percent (50%) of the respondents characterized their roles in school related activities and initiatives as being "leadership type" situations.

Following are statements illustrative of the contributions made by respondents who have become involved in their school or school district as a result of their participation in the distance degree program:

> *I have helped to reduce the discipline load of the principal and assistant principal so that they can more fairly evaluate teachers. In the past, they've only observed for a very short amount of time.*
>
> *Not only have I provided leadership, but I've been able to share my knowledge of the principal's many responsibilities and develop empathy for that role.*
>
> *Since I am a beginning teacher and a member of the cohort group, I've added some newer and different views, ideas, insights, and opinions. I am more "up-to-date" than many of my colleagues.*
>
> *I have always been an advocate for the library. I now have a better understanding of other areas in education where we need to improve our district--such as in technology and evaluation processes. I am able to make suggestions as to how to move these areas along.*
>
> *As a member of various committees, and teams, I feel that I have been able to provide some level of expertise in matters which I have researched, or have learned about from course work or from interactions with my cohort.*
>
> *I have contributed leadership, consensus thinking, and facilitated methods for meeting goals and objectives.*

I've assisted in the renewal of my school's mathematics department and in the development of my school's local community business partnership.

I have assisted in the development of a district wide plan for ESEA federal programs and I have become a sexual harassment workshop trainer.

I have involved myself in my school's crisis response team's work.

Articulating the 'Professional Community'. All respondents (100%) indicated that they had become more keenly aware of the need and importance of developing working conversations among their fellow educators at school and within their school districts about new and recurring problems and issues. Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents indicated that they had played a role initiating conversations at their school site or within their school districts about important educational issues. Prominent issues in which respondents have engaged fellow teachers, principals, and district leaders include: (listed in order of importance by respondents)

- Special Education/Inclusion
- Curriculum and Technology
- Student Discipline/Teacher and School Evaluations (equal ratings of importance)
- School Budgets and Facilities

The 'Professional Community': Reaching Common Understandings. Fifty percent (50%) of respondents indicated that professional discussions of school issues and problems occurred "both formally and informally" in their schools. Thirty percent (30%)

of respondents indicated that their school communities held regular and productive professional conversations. Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents indicated that they and fellow educators had arrived at some common understandings and agreements upon which to take further action for the benefit of their students and schools. Following is a representative sampling of the "common understandings" reached by respondents:

> *The administrator is extremely important in creating a positive and safe school environment. He/she must be supported.*
>
> *Parents cannot be forced to participate in school activities where they feel uncomfortable or judged.*
>
> *We need to empower students and to affirm the dignity of human life instead of constantly judging students by their test scores. The goal of education in every arena should be to prepare students to live with dignity and purpose. We need to be in the business of teaching knowledge, but also teaching how to channel knowledge to human ends.*
>
> *Inclusion is for "all" of our students.*
>
> *Technology is a wonderful too, but it is not a substitute for teaching.*
>
> *Given the recent changes in top level management positions in our district, the faculty in my building (five of whom are in this cohort) have called into question and challenged some of the decisions which will affect our program. We have presented a united front when meeting with district supervisory personnel.*

Summary and Discussion

Data from this study represent an initial query of a longer longitudinal study of the graduates from a distance delivered master's degree program in Education. The focus of this longitudinal study is to track the meanings and activities attributed by graduates of this first cohort group to their growing understanding and involvement in building the foundations of the "professional community" among their colleagues and within schools at the site and district levels. Students seeking advanced preparation for classroom teaching and students seeking eventual licensure as school administrators comprised the enrollment of this first cohort distance graduate degree program. This uniform track of graduate education has confirmed mutual identities and sharing among students and has provided insightful clues and information about the "disparate lives" among educators.

Students in both tracks of the graduate program expressed a need to become more technologically versed and literate as a means of exploring innovative strategies for teaching and management. Pre-course exercises afforded students mutual opportunities to reflect upon their career goals and to obtain first hand information about the life, activities, and duties of the school principal.

Twenty-two of 30 students completed a questionnaire that provided insights into their personal activities in building and/or participating in foundational activities germane to the establishment of a "professional community'. All respondents to the survey agreed that their enrollment in this distance degree program had expanded and deepened their

understandings of the professional and personal qualities needed by successful teachers and school leaders.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents indicated that they had become active and involved in activities and initiatives at their school site or within their school district. While a majority of respondents indicated that they " might" have been involved in similar activities without benefit of the cohort program, twenty-seven percent (27%) of student respondents indicated that the cohort program served as a catalyst for their eventual involvements. Fifteen students characterized their roles in activities and initiatives as being one of "leadership". Involvement in selected activities served to boost the confidence, competence, and sense of efficacy in a significant number of the respondents, many of whom attributed their success and participation to the knowledge base and the interaction provided through a cooperative and supportive distance cohort degree program.

The cooperative nature and design of this graduate distance degree program and the lessons learned from professionals interacting cooperatively and thoughtfully with each other for the improvement of teacher and principal competencies and of student achievement is perhaps best captured in the observations of Louis et al (1996b) who observe,

> The finding that evaluations of the climate and collegial resources available are associated with professional community adds weight to the argument that the structural elements of "restructuring" have received excessive emphasis in many reform proposals, while the need to improve culture, climate, and interpersonal relationships

in schools has received too little attention (p.178).

Continued Study

Schon (1983) reminds us that virtually all of society's business is conducted by professionals with special training and understanding to provide health care, operate businesses, adjudicate laws, manage cities, design and construct buildings, and teach children. Smith and Andrews (1989) contend, "We are faced with providing leaders who can orchestrate the talents of these professionals so that patients get well, goods are produced, people receive due process, and students learn" (p.3). Questions about what kind of leadership and whether that leadership is universal for all types of organizations remain troubling issues. Loss of confidence in school leadership and teacher efficacy come from a perception that school leadership is at a low ebb among all school personnel (Smith and Andrews, 1989). Powell, Farrar, and Cohen (1985) and Goodlad (1984) suggest that: (1) the average classroom and its teacher is an island unto itself, rarely intruded upon by a school administrator for evaluative or improvement purposes; and (2) that is the way the average teacher in the average school wants it to be. In this educational context Andrews and Smith (1989) ask, "If this is the current condition, what, then, leads us to believe that the education of all children in those schools would improve if we restructure schools so that we take more of our good teachers out of the classroom, or simply turn more of the control of our schools over to teachers and parents?" (pp.3-4).

A promising basis for understanding how to create the "professional community" for effective school reform comes from the work of Schon (1983). Schon's thesis is that in order for professionals to meet the challenges of their work, they need to depend less on what they learned in graduate school than what they have learned in practice. Consequently, the problem is how to make graduate school or the training of professional educators more relevant so that when they reflect in practice, the broader framework of theory and research are the basis of that reflection. That reflection, as evidenced through the programmatic design of this distance graduate degree cohort program and by the initial results of this study, is particularly potent for understanding the need and desirability for the "professional community" among educators in all schools.

Schon's work provides three types of framework upon which further study of the efficacy of this graduate degree program and of the "professional community"can be studied. That framework includes *reflection in action* (the professional reflects about the problem rather than acting impulsively), *reflection on action* (the professional thinks critically about something that has already been done), and *reflection while in action* (the professional is on "automatic pilot" with professional routines and engages in critical inquiry about other things).

It will be the purpose of this continued longitudinal study to use the framework suggested by Schon (1983) as a basis for understanding the involvement, initiation, collaboration, and effects of school reform initiatives among the Cohort One graduates of this program within their site schools and within their school districts. This continued study will necessitate a differentiation between "teacher leaders" and "principal leaders"in

their respective educational environments and how these two groups converge in their understanding of the need for the "professional community" as means of fostering effective school reform and change. The dynamics and interplay of "shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, and collaboration" in the process of leadership will be informative to the dialogue on consensus building and collaboration within schools and school districts engaged in substantive and effective school reform measures of short and long term duration.

Louis et al (1996) have noted that the implementation of the "professional community" will require the collaborative interaction of principals and empowered teachers with a shared vision of education. This new configuration of school leadership will require that both groups acquire complimentary and discreet skills that must successfuly interplay for effective school operations. Continued study of the dynamics of this new leadership configuration will also be informative to schools and colleges of education which presently educate teachers and principals for discreet tasks which are giving way to more collaborative forms of work. This study will seek to delineate those skills which must be acquired by both teachers and aspiring school principals within a framework of the "professional community" for effective leadership and substantive school reform.

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